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LOVE IN DANGER
THREE PLAYS

ELLIS

State Teachers College
Warrensburg, Mo.
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LOVE IN DANGER

ELLIS EDITH MARY OLD

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By Mrs. Havelock Ellis

LOVE IN DANGER. Three Plays.
LOVE-ACRE. An Idyll of Two Worlds.
STEVE'S WOMAN.
THREE MODERN SEERS.
THE LOVER'S CALENDAR; An Anthology.

AT ALL BOOKSELLERS

LOVE IN DANGER

LOVE IN DANGER

THREE PLAYS

BY

MRS. HAVELOCK ELLIS

Edith M. O. (Leeds)

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1915

CENTRAL MISSOURI
STATE UNIVERSITY
Warrensburg
Missouri

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Published April 1915

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TO

MY THREE FAITHFUL FRIENDS

GUSSIE, BLUE AND

GWENNIE

12688

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THE SUBJECTION OF KEZIA

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

Joe Pengilly.
Kezia (*Joe Pengilly's wife*).
Matthew Trevaskis (*a friend of the Pengillys*).

The Scene is laid in a Cornish cottage.

Time: The Present.

The whole action of the play takes place between seven o'clock and nine o'clock on a Saturday evening.

THE SUBJECTION OF KEZIA

SCENE. — *Interior of a cottage kitchen in a Cornish fishing village. The walls are distempered a pale blue; the ceiling wooden and beamed. Middle of back wall, a kitchen-range where fire is burning. At back* R. *is a door opening into an inner room. At back* L. *small cupboards. At side* L. *is a large kitchen-table laid for tea under a window facing sea. The floor is red brick. On mantelpiece, white china dogs, clock, copper candlesticks, tea-caddy, stirrups, and bits. On walls, family framed photographs, religious framed pictures. Below table is a door leading into street. Behind door, roller with hanging towel. Usual kitchen paraphernalia, chairs, pots and pans, etc. Cat basket with straw to* R. *of range. At back* R. *is a wooden settle with good upright sides.* JOE PENGILLY *is wiping his face and hands, having just come in from the pump outside. He sighs and glances uneasily at* KEZIA, *who has her back turned to him, and is frying mackerel at the stove. He rolls down his sleeves slowly and watches his wife uneasily. He is dressed as a laborer — corduroy trousers, hob-nailed boots, blue-and-white shirt, open throat. He takes down a sleeved waistcoat from a peg behind the door and puts it on. He is a slight*

man with thin light hair, gentle in manner, but with a strong keen face. KEZIA *is a little taller than* JOE *— slender and graceful, with a clean cotton dress fitting well to her figure; a clean apron, well-dressed and tidy hair; good-looking and energetic.* JOE *smiles to himself and crosses his arms and shuffles his feet as he looks towards* KEZIA. KEZIA *turns round suddenly and looks at him sideways, the cooking-fork in one hand and the handle of the frying-pan in the other.* JOE *sits down at table.*

KEZIA

Why did n't thee speak?

JOE

Nothin' to say, my dear.

KEZIA

Thee 's not much company, for sure.

[JOE *laughs and leans his arms on the table as he looks at* KEZIA; *his face beams as he watches her landing the fish from the bubbling fat to a dish. She puts some on a plate in front of* JOE, *and pours out tea in a large cup. She suddenly looks at him as he begins picking off the tail of his mackerel with his fingers.*

KEZIA

Cain't thee answer?

JOE

To what?

KEZIA

[*Snappily.*] Why, to me, of course.

[JOE *takes a long drink of tea and gazes at her over his cup.*

JOE

Thee'rt a great beauty, Kezia, sure enough!

[*He puts the cup down and goes on picking his fish with the fingers of one hand, while the other holds bread and butter.*

KEZIA

There you are again; always either grumblin' or jeerin' at me.

JOE

I'm not doin' neither, woman. I'm tryin' for to make up for thrawtin' of you this mornin' over they soaked crusties as I gave the cat and ruined the nice clean floor.

KEZIA

Now, [*angrily*] just when I were forgettin' all about it, of course you must bring it all up again, and you're tryin' now [*pointing at the fish*] all thee knows how, to make the tablecloth like a dish-clout with thy great greasy fingers!

[JOE *licks his fingers, one by one, and wipes*

them on his trousers, as he smiles into her cross face.

KEZIA

Gracious! [*whimpering*] that 's thee all over. Thee gives up one dirty trick for another. I believe you only married me to clean and tidy after you.

[JOE *laughs heartily and looks up at her.*

JOE

Heart alive! I married you because you are the only woman I 've ever met in my life I could never weary of, not even if you tormented me night and day. Love of 'e, my dear, seemly, makes a real fool of me most of my time.

[*His face becomes very grave, and* KEZIA'S *brow clears as she sits down and begins to eat.*

KEZIA

You was always one for pretty talk, Joe, but you 're not a bit what you were i' deeds lately.

[JOE *hands his cup for more tea.*

JOE

'Cause you snap me up so.

KEZIA

There you are again, tryin' to pick a quarrel.

[JOE *pulls his chair away from the table and*

drags it nearer the grate. He takes his pipe from his pocket and blows into it.

KEZIA

Now, Joe, you know I cain't abide that 'baccy smell: it gives me a headache.

JOE

It gives me a headache to do without 'baccy.

[JOE *polishes his pipe-bowl on his sleeve, puts the stem in his mouth, and takes out some shag.* KEZIA *watches him as she removes the tea-things.* JOE *watches her out of the corner of his eye as he slowly fills his pipe.*

KEZIA

I 'm fair wore out.

[JOE *gets up, puts his pipe on the mantlepiece and his knife and shag in his pocket, and advances towards* KEZIA. *He puts his hands on her shoulders and looks in her eyes.*

JOE

Kiss us, old girl!

KEZIA

Don't be so silly. I don't feel like it at all, and I want to be with mother again.

JOE

And married only two years!

KEZIA

It seems like six to me.

JOE

What ails thee, lass?

KEZIA

Don't keep allus askin' questions and bein' so quarrelsome; I 'm mazed at the sight of 'e, sure enough. [*She folds the cloth, pokes the fire, goes into the inner room, at back* R., *and comes in again with her hat and shawl on and a basket in her hand. She looks at* JOE, *and wipes her eyes.*] You can sit there as long as you 've a mind to, and smoke your insides black and blue. I 'm going to market a bit, and then I shall go into Blanch Sally and talk to she. She 've got a bit of common sense. It 's just on eight o'clock, and I shan't be more nor an hour or so.

[JOE *does not stir as* KEZIA *goes out of the front door.* KEZIA *looks back to see if he 'll turn, but he does not move. He gazes into the fire with his hands clasped behind his head, and his chair tilted back.*

JOE

I 'd as soon be a dog as a man, sure enough! *They* can sit by the fire and be comfortable.

[*He jumps up suddenly as he hears a knock at the door.*] Come in!

[*The street door opens softly, and* MATTHEW TREVASKIS *comes in very quietly. He is a stout, short man with bushy hair and a beard. He also is dressed as a laborer. He looks at* JOE *and gives a low whistle.*

MATTHEW

Hallo, mate!

JOE

Oh! you?

[JOE *sits down again, points to another chair, and looks gloomily back into the fire.*

MATTHEW

Well, brother! Thee looks as if thee'd run out o' speerits and 'baccy both.

JOE

I 'm moody, like a thing.

[MATTHEW *laughs and draws his chair up close to* JOE. *He pulls down his waistcoat, and then puts his fingers in the arm-holes, as he contemplates* JOE.

MATTHEW

Got the hump, mate? Have 'e?

[JOE *shakes his head dolefully from side to side and sighs.*

MATTHEW

Jaw, I suppose? [JOE *nods.*

MATTHEW

Thought so. I met the missus as I came along looking a bit teasy. Women's the devil that way. It's in their breed and bone, like fightin' in we. You began all wrong, like me, mate, and females always takes advantage of honeymoon ways, and stamps on we if we don't take 'em in hand at once.

[JOE *sighs, crosses his legs and looks at his friend.*

JOE

Drat it all! I never began no different to what I am now. I cain't make things up at all. I'm fairly mazed, never having had dealin's with no female, except mother, who was mostly ill, and never in tantrums.

[MATTHEW *rises, pokes* JOE *in the ribs and laughs.*

MATTHEW

Cheer up, brother, there's no bigger fool than a man as is sent crazy with a woman.

JOE

Women is mazy things.

MATTHEW

There's allus 'baccy for to fortify us against them, thanks be.

[MATTHEW *draws a little black clay pipe out of his waistcoat pocket and points to* JOE'S *pipe on the mantelpiece as he sits down.*

JOE

Kezia 'ates 'baccy in the house.

MATTHEW

Smoke all the time, then: it's the only way.

[JOE *smiles and smoothes his thin straight hair.*

JOE

You allus forgets I 'm bent on pleasin' of Kezia.

[MATTHEW *stretches out his legs, and his face becomes calm and thoughtful. He speaks very deliberately.*

MATTHEW

The more thee tries to please women, mate, the more crotchety they becomes. Within bounds I keep the peace in our place like a judge, but she 've learnt, Jane Ann have, that I 'll put my foot down on any out-of-the-way tantrums. Give them

their heads and they 'll soon have we by the heels.

JOE

Sometimes I wonder if we give 'em their heads enough. Perhaps they 'd domineer less if we left 'em take their own grainy ways.

MATTHEW

You bet! If I gave in to Jane Ann entirely, where the devil do 'e think I should be at all?

[*The two men laugh together and light their pipes and smoke hard.*

JOE

I 've no notion.

MATTHEW

Well! I should be like a cat out in the rain, never certain where to put my feet. As it is, as you do know, I cain't keep no dog for fear of the mess its feet 'ud make on the floor; I cain't have a magpie in a cage 'cause its seed 'ud 'appen fall on the table. I 've got to walk ginger like a rooster in wet grass for fear o' disturbin' the sand on the clean floor, and I rubs my feet on the mat afore I goes in to my meals enough to split

it in half. I gives in to all they things 'cause I was took captive over them, in a manner of speaking, almost afore I 'd finished courting, and it takes years to understand women's fancies! It 's worse nor any book learnin', is understandin' women; and then, when you think you 've learnt 'em off by heart, any man 'ud fail under a first standard examination on 'em. [*He gets up and shakes* Joe *by the shoulder.*] Listen to me, mate! Bein' a real pal to thee, Joe, I 'm warnin' of 'e now afore it 's too late, for thee 's only been wed two years, and there 's time to alter things yet.

[Joe *suddenly gets up and goes to the door to see if it is fastened, and returns to face his friend. He takes off his long-sleeved waistcoat and throws it on a chair, after putting down his pipe.*

Joe

Matthey!

Matthew

Yes?

Joe

Don't you think it is too late even now?

Matthew

Fur what? It 's no use speakin' i' riddles,

man. Trust or no trust — that 's my plan. Thee 's the only livin' man or woman, for the matter of that, as I 've blackened Jane Ann to, and if it 'll ease thy mind to tell what 's worritin' of thee, you do know it 's as safe as if you 'd dropt your secret into the mouth of a mine shaft.

JOE

Done! Give me a hearing and let 's have finished with it.

[MATTHEW *cleans out the bowl of his pipe and knocks the ashes out against the grate as he waits for his friend to begin.* JOE *stands first on one leg and then on the other and gives a long whistle.*

MATTHEW

Sling along. It won't get no easier wi' keeping.

[JOE *wipes his forehead with a red handkerchief, which he takes out of his trouser pocket.*

JOE

Awkward kind o' work, pullin' your lawful wife to bits.

MATTHEW

It 'll get easier as thee goes on, man. I 'll help thee. What 's the row to-day?

JOE

Crusties.

[MATTHEW *winks at* JOE *and lights his pipe again.*

MATTHEW

It 's always some feeble thing like that as makes confusion in a house. Jane Ann began just like that. Dirty boots in the best parlor was my first offense, and it raised hell in our house for nigh on a whole day.

JOE

Well, I never! It was just the same thing in a way with me. I soaked the crusties in my tea this mornin' and threw 'em to the cat under the table, and I suppose I must 'ave put my foot in 'em, for Kezia went off like a thing gone mazy. She stormed and said — [*he sits down and wipes his forehead again with his handkerchief as he pauses*] — as she were a fool to take me, and all sorts, and then she cried fit to kill herself, and when I spoke she told me to hold my noise, and when I did n't speak she said I 'd no feelin's, and was worse nor a stone. We scarcely spoke at dinner-time. She said she wished she was dead, and wanted her mother, and that, bein' a man, I was worse nor a

devil; and when I kept on eatin' she said she wondered the food did n't choke me, and when I stopped eatin' she said I was never pleased wi' nothin' she 'd got ready for me. My head is sore with the clang of the teasy things she drove into me, and I 'm not good at replies, as you do know.

[JOE *ends in a weary voice and pokes the fire listlessly.* MATTHEW *smokes hard and his eyes are on the ground.*

MATTHEW

Women be mysteries, and without little uns they 'm worse nor monsters. A child do often alter and soften 'em, but a childless woman is as near a wolf as anything I do know.

[JOE'S *elbows sink on his knees and his hands support his woebegone face. When he next speaks he has a catch in his voice, and he speaks quickly.*

JOE

That 's it, is it?

MATTHEW

Iss, mate! That 's the mischief. Unless —[*he looks up suddenly at* JOE]—perhaps she be goin' to surprise 'e by telling 'e she be going to have a little one. That would account for her bein' teasy and moody.

[JOE *laughs sorrowfully.*

JOE

Lor', I should be the first to know that, surely!

MATTHEW

Not a bit of it. Women loves secrets of that sort.

JOE

No; 't ain't that at all. I only wish it was, if what you say be true of women.

MATTHEW

True enough, my son. I did the cutest day's work in my life when I persuaded Jane Ann to take little Joe to help we. I watched the two of 'em together and found he caught his tongueing, too, from she, but it had a sort of nestle sound in it as if she were a-cuddlin' of him. She 've been gentler wi' me ever since Joe come back again after his long bout at home.

[JOE *scratches his head very thoughtfully; a pause, in which he seems to be thinking before speaking again.*

JOE

I don't know of no sister's child to take on for Kezia at all. What 's the next remedy, think you?

MATTHEW

A thrashin'.

[JOE *jumps up and stares at* MATTHEW.

JOE

A what?

MATTHEW

Wallop her just once.

[MATTHEW *looks on the ground and taps it with his foot, and he does not see that* JOE *is standing over him with his hands clenched.*

JOE

Shame on thee, mate! I feel more like strikin' thee nor a female. I 'm sorry I told thee, if thee can offer no more help than that. I 'm not much of a chap, but I 've never struck a woman yet.

MATTHEW

Strike on principle, then.

[*He still looks fixedly at the floor, and* JOE *stands glaring at him.*

JOE

How?

MATTHEW

Like the Almighty strikes when He 've got a lesson for we to learn, which we won't learn without stripes and tears. Nothin' is

of no avail to stop His chastisement if He do think it's goin' to work out His plan for He and we, and that 's what I'm wanting of you to do by your wife for her sake more than for yours. Wives must learn to submit. [*Harshly.*] It 's Divine Providence as 'ave ordered it, and women be miserable, like ivy and trailers of all sorts, if they 've no prop to bear 'em up. Beat her once and it 'll make a man of you and be a life-long warnin' to she.

JOE

But I love her, man! [*Softly.*] The very thought of hurting her makes me creep.

[JOE *shrugs his shoulders and shakes his head repeatedly.*

MATTHEW

Women likes bein' hurt. It 's a real fondlin' to 'em at times.

[JOE *sits down and folds his arms as he looks humbly at* MATTHEW.

JOE

Lor', I never heard that afore. How can you be sure of that at all?

MATTHEW

I've traveled, as you do knaw. I ain't

been to Africa for nothin', mate. I 've seen a deal o' things, which if I 'd happened on afore I courted Jane Ann would have got me through the marriage scrimmage wi' no tiles off of my roof. That 's why I 'm a warnin' of you afore it 's too late. Your woman be worth gettin' i' trim — [*with a sigh*] — for she 's — well — she 's —

[JOE'S *eyes rest on his friend's face and his face suddenly lights up with a smile.*

JOE

She 's the best sort of woman a man could 'ave for a sweetheart when her moods is off, and it 's only lately her 've altered so, and I expect it 's really all my fault.

MATTHEW

Certainly it is; you 've never shown master yet, and you must this very night.

JOE

[*Coughs nervously.*] How?

MATTHEW

You must thrash her before it is too late. Have 'e a cane?

[JOE *jumps up, twists round his necktie, undoes it, ties it again — marches up and down the little kitchen, and wheels round on* MATTHEW.

JOE

You 'm a fair brute, Matthew Trevaskis.

MATTHEW

And you 'm a coward, Joe Pengilly. [MATTHEW *clasps his hands round his raised knee and nods at* JOE, *who sits.*] I 've given you golden advice, and if only a pal had given it to me years ago I should n't be in the place I 'm in now, but be master of my own wife and my own chimney-corner.

[JOE *puts his hands in his pockets and tilts back his chair as he gazes up at the ceiling as if for inspiration.*

JOE

I cain't stomach the idea at all; it 's like murderin' a baby, somehow.

MATTHEW

Stuff! You need n't lay on too hard to make bruises nor nothin'.

[JOE *goes pale and puts his head in his hands for a moment, and he almost whispers.*

JOE

Good Lord! Bruises! Why, man, she 've got flesh like a flower!

[MATTHEW *suddenly holds out his hand to* JOE, *who shakes it feebly.*

MATTHEW

I almost envies thee, mate. Why, thee 's fair daft wi' love still.

JOE

Of course I be! [*Sullenly.*] She 's more nor meat and drink to me; allus have been since the first day I took to she.

MATTHEW

All the more reason for thee to beat her, and at once. [*Sternly.*] You 'll lose her, sure enough, if you don't. It 's the only chance for thee now, and I do knaw I 'm speaking gospel truth.

[*A long pause, in which* JOE *meditates with a grave face. He suddenly snaps the fingers of his right hand as he says quickly.*

JOE

I 'll do it. It 'll nearly be the finish of me, but if you 're certain sure she 'll love me more after it I 'll shut my eyes and set my teeth and — and — yes, upon my soul, I 'll do it! She 'm more to me than all the world, and I 'll save she and myself with her. But are you sure it will do any good?

[MATTHEW *wrings* JOE'S *hands and then slaps him on the back.*

MATTHEW

I swear it, brother. [*Solemnly.*] I 've never once known it fail.

JOE

[*Anxiously.*] Never once in all your travels? [MATTHEW *looks down.*

MATTHEW

Iss, mate, once, sure enough, but the woman had never cared twopence for the man to start with. After it she left 'un altogether.

JOE

[*With a groan.*] Oh! Good Lord!

MATTHEW

That was no fair start like a thing. See?

JOE

No, to be sure.

MATTHEW

Now! [*He strikes* JOE'S *shoulder briskly.*] Now for it!

[JOE *twists round towards the door, and a miserable smile is on his lips.*

JOE

Well, what now?

[MATTHEW *bends down to* JOE'S *ear and whispers.*

MATTHEW

We must go and buy the cane.

JOE

Sakes!

MATTHEW

Bear up! It'll all be over by this time to-morrow night, and that's a great stand by, is n't it?

JOE

I suppose it is. [*Gloomily.*] Who 'll be spokesman over the buyin' ?

MATTHEW

Me, my son. How far will 'e go i' price?

[JOE *shakes his head and looks wearily at* MATTHEW.

JOE

It's no odds to me, Matthey; I don't know and don't care!

MATTHEW

Will sixpence ruin 'e?

JOE

It 's all ruin. I 'm sweatin' like a bull with fear and shame, and wish I was dead and buried.

[MATTHEW *points to the door and the two men move slowly towards it.*

MATTHEW

It 's just on nine o'clock. Kezia will be back afore we start if we don't mind. Don't stop to think when you come back, but rush right in and set at it at once, and she 'll have time to come round before you settle for the night. Bein' Saturday night, all the neighbors be mostly i' town shoppin', and if there should be a scream I 'll make up a yarn to any one who comes near as 'll stop all gossip. I shan't be far off till I reckon it 's all over.

[JOE'S *teeth are set and his head down, and he gazes at the door and then at* MATTHEW, *irresolutely.*

MATTHEW

Thee deserves to lose her if thee be real chicken-hearted like this 'ere.

[JOE *makes a dart forward, unlatches the door, rushes out followed by* MATTHEW.

MATTHEW

[*Outside.*] Go round by the croft and then we shan't meet her coming home.

[*After a pause the door slowly opens and* KEZIA *comes in. She has a basket in one hand and a string bag full of parcels in the other. She looks round, puts her parcels on the table and in the cupboards, pokes the fire, and then takes her basket in her hand again, looks at the*

clock and goes into the inner room. She comes back with her outdoor garments off and a loose dressing-jacket of white and blue linen over her arm. She goes to a drawer in the table and brings out a little comb and brush and stands thinking.

KEZIA

I 'll do my hair down here. He cain't be long, and it 's cold upstairs. Gone for tobacco, I suppose, and he 'll want his tea when he comes in.

[*She puts the kettle on the fire. She undoes her hair, facing audience; shakes it about her shoulders, puts on her dressing-jacket and begins to brush and comb her hair before the fire, and near the settle she bends down and warms her hands, singing a lullaby as she does so. She then stands facing the fire, smiling to herself as she sings. So absorbed is she in her thoughts that she does not see the street-door open and the white, scared face of* JOE *appear. He puts his hands behind his back when he has softly shut the door, and tip-toes towards* KEZIA, *who never sees him till he has sat down swiftly on the settle, the further corner to where she stands. His left hand, with the cane in it, is not visible to* KEZIA, *as it is hidden by the end of the settle. Tying a large plait on one side of her head — the nearest to him — with pink ribbon, she suddenly turns*

round and sees him, and their eyes meet. She sits down by him. KEZIA'S *face is very sweet and smiling as she tosses the plait over her shoulder.*

KEZIA

Seen a ghost, Joey, my dear, or is it Kezia come to her senses at last, think you?

[JOE *does not stir. He gazes at* KEZIA *with a puzzled and tender expression.*

JOE

What's come to thee, lass?

KEZIA

Guess!

[KEZIA *clasps her hands behind her head and looks into* JOE'S *face with a happy smile.*

JOE

Cain't at all.

KEZIA

Come close, sweetheart.

[*She draws nearer to* JOE, *who does not move, and tries to keep the cane hidden. He suddenly draws her close to him with his right arm, and whispers.*

JOE

Kezia.

KEZIA

[*Softly.*] Joey, my dear! [*She nestles closer to him and puts her head on his shoulder.*] He'll be the dearest little thing a woman ever bore.

[JOE *laughs softly, kisses* KEZIA *gently on the eyes, brow, and then mouth, and holds her closely to him.*

JOE

Heaven cain't be more desirable than this.

KEZIA

To think there'll be three of us soon. You see now why I've been so teasy lately. Now I'll sing all day long so he'll be a happy boy.

[JOE *does not move. He makes furtive attempts to hide the cane behind the settle, and moves a little as he continues to smile at* KEZIA.

KEZIA

Thee 'rt smiling, Joe! Thee and me 'ave both hungered for the same thing. Did thee guess it at all, I wonder? I've kept it from thee a while to make sure. But, lor'! my dear life! whatever be this that you've got here? [*She pulls the long cane out of* JOE's *hands and holds it in hers. They both look at it very solemnly for a few moments, and* JOE

scratches his head sadly, unable to speak. She bursts into a merry laugh and her lips tremble.] Eh! Joe! lad! [*softly*]. Thee was always unlike other chaps; that 's why I do love thee so. Fancy thee guessing, and going to buy him somethin' right away! [*She puts her face in her hands and sobs and laughs together.*] Oh! it brings it so near like. Most men would have thought of a cradle or a rattle, but thee! Oh! my dear! [*She throws her arms round his neck and kisses him on the mouth.*] Thee thought of the first beatin' we should be forced to give him, for, of course, he 'll be a lad of tremenjous spirit.

JOE

[*Suddenly, and snatching the cane from* KEZIA.] So he will. Both his father and mother be folk of great spirit, and — the first time as he dirts the tablecloth or frets his mother, I 'll lay it on him as, thanks be, I 've never laid it on nobody yet.

CURTAIN

THE PIXY

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

BEN TREMAYNE (*a Cornish farmer*).
LUKE TREMAYNE (*Ben Tremayne's son*).
SAMPSON DANIEL (*a rival farmer*).

The Scene is laid in a Cornish farm kitchen.

TIME: THE PRESENT.

The whole action of the play takes place on a Monday morning about twelve o'clock.

THE PIXY

SCENE. — *A farmhouse kitchen. Facing audience big stove with fire. Old-fashioned chair* R. *and settle* L. *Bright tins on mantel, warming-pan at side.* R. *of stove large kitchen-table beyond chair. Framed colored prints of seascape and sailing-boats. Ordinary kitchen furniture, as cupboard, fender, and fire-irons. A ham tied in cloth hanging from beams* L. *side behind settle — bundles of herbs in muslin bags hanging other side. Pegs behind door on* R. *beyond settle; and also by side of door for whips, etc.; long driving-whip and bits by these. A spittoon on* R. *of fireplace near fender. A big burly sandy-bearded farmer,* BEN TREMAYNE, *sits on chair between fireplace and table. Over table, window with flowers in pots. Muslin blind and cretonne curtains by side.* BEN TREMAYNE *is dressed in dark-brown corduroy breeches with brown gaiters; these both rather shabby and latter mud-stained. Big hob-nailed boots but tidy collar and flannel shirt with black tie. Opposite to him* LUKE TREMAYNE *is sitting corner-wise at end of settle nearest fireplace and so facing audience. He is a wiry man of about five feet six, slight brown mustache — otherwise clean-shaven. His arms are folded and his head lowered as curtain goes up. He is*

dressed in dark-blue serge trousers and flannel shirt, with long-sleeved waistcoat of same, only sleeves are of nankeen. His boots are not hob-nailed. He is the type of man both gentle and firm — practical and idealistic — not a suspicion of mawkishness and not what is termed virile. No bluster or conceit in his actions or voice. As curtain goes up, BEN TREMAYNE *is seen bending forward towards his son and his face is anxious and solemn.*

BEN

You be beaten low, Luke. You was never one to cope with woman's whims. Living or dead they'd be bound to maze you. You allus took 'em serious. I warned you, but you 'd never listen. You was modeled for a bachelor and missed. Howsomever, if you was bent on marrying, it would have come to the same thing if you 'd chosen a plain-featured woman with property to steady you instead of a will o' the wisp.

[BEN *gazes intently at his son as he leans forward with both hands on his knees.* LUKE *jerks his head backwards and then lowers it again as he mutters.*

LUKE

There was never no whims.

[BEN *snaps his fingers, keeping one hand on*

his knee as he does so. Then he points his fingers at his son.

BEN

Thee could never see wood for trees, Luke. She was a passil of whims and fancies, but they was gilded over with smiles and cossetings. She 've brought you low at last. Her saucy life was n't enough, but now she've left you to tend yourself and with no heart to seek a suitable female in the future.

[LUKE *throws back his head and folds his hands at the back of it. His eyes flash. He speaks slowly.*

LUKE

I 'm uplifted beyond all seeming.

BEN

[*Looking puzzled.*] Not by her death, surely.

LUKE

Iss ! Even in the face of her death. Death can't snatch what is n't snatchable. It 's not as big as —

[*He stops and his father interrupts roughly.*

BEN

Thy calf love.

LUKE

[*Smiling sadly.*] No. I meant our happiness. It can't never rob me of what 's been.

[BEN *sits up in his chair and takes a pipe from his pocket and blows fiercely into it. Then he suddenly puts it back again.*

BEN

Smoking do help my tongue a bit, but it ain't seemly in the house of mourning.

LUKE

Smoke away if it 'll make thee think different of she. Not but that she 's well out of the way of thy smearing.

[BEN *stands up, fills his pipe, and then takes a taper from the mantelpiece and lights it. He stands astride before the fire, holding the pipe in his mouth before speaking.*

BEN

Death be ofttimes a g'eat release. [*His voice grows kinder.*] Better things be ahead for thee yet, my son. The neighbors do well to call thee Hop o' my Thumb. You 'm wonderful small i' body, but you overcame Tom Curnow's bull seemly with a glance of your eyes. You was all right till you fell in with that girl. Her tripetty walk was a snare in itself, sure enough. You was mazed, and

you're mazed still, or you'd believe what every one but you knows for gospel truth. It's not wholesome for any man to fall down and worship idols, especially if they be saucy chits instead of graven images.

[BEN *blows volumes from his pipe and spits fiercely into the spittoon.*

LUKE

Husht! father. She be dead, mind.

[BEN TREMAYNE *growls.*

BEN

And thee be childless. The property will have to go to strangers unless you marry again, and by all the signs that is n't likely.

[LUKE *stands up and smiles and sighs as he goes over to poke the fire. His father stands aside, and then suddenly hits his son on the back as* LUKE *bends down to rake out the ashes.*

BEN

Oh! you may smile. A child as 'ave been burnt once don't shun the fire. Don't you believe it. It's more then likely it 'll get worse burnt next time. If you'd believe what the village do say it might leave your fancy free.

LUKE

The village! [*He jumps up and pokes his*

finger into his father's chest.] Have you forgotten how you and me manufactured tales for pastime years ago? That 'll tell you what village talk be worth.

BEN

Them as had eyes could see. [BEN *speaks sternly and walks up and down the stage. He suddenly stops short and jerks out his sentences slowly.*] Some of us have ears too. Hedges and sand dunes ain't granite to fence off love whispers.

[LUKE *draws himself to his full height and puts his hands in his pockets.* BEN *sits down and shuffles his feet with his eyes on the ground.*

LUKE

My gosh! [*His voice is bitter and he suddenly crosses over to the table and thumps it with his fist.*] Is this the way to cheer a man as the Lord 'ave seemly felled? [*He goes back and sits in the corner of the settle with his hands clasped between his knees gazing at his father.*] If what you say be true, is n't it enough without jawin' over it, and if it be false, ain't you afraid of being struck dead?

[BEN *looks up suddenly at the ceiling as a slight noise is heard overhead.*

BEN

What 's that? [*He gets up and half whispers as he touches* LUKE *on the shoulder.*] Own up, man, you know she was —

[*He stops suddenly as he hears another step overhead, and gazes at the ceiling and then at* LUKE.

LUKE

A winsome, witching woman, too good for any man among us and neither you nor all the apostles and angels in heaven could make me believe any other.

BEN

[*Roughly.*] You be a blasted fool.

LUKE

That may be, but you may be partly accountable for that. Anyway, I 'm not going to believe evil of my lawful wife, nor yet listen to it sitting. If that 's all as you 've come to say, let 's talk of crops.

[BEN *strides over to the door and takes down his cap.* LUKE *stands still by the fire.*

BEN

Crops! Yes. You 'll have crops in plenty presently. Scandal and shame be your harvest. Her sudden death and the talk afore it

don't help appearances. She was scared with her sins and—

[*He stops as he sees the pain in* LUKE'S *eyes.* LUKE *looks as if he would spring at his throat, then shrugs his shoulders and speaks quietly.*

LUKE

Her heart were allus weak, the doctor said. Her spirit wore it down. We was spared last words.

[BEN *puts on his hat and takes his big stick from the corner. He holds out his hand and hits the palm with the knob of the stick.*

BEN

They are beginning to call you a ninny and well they may. They 'll shun you soon for an unchristian fool as countenances sin in his own wife.

LUKE

There's ninnies and ninnies. The biggest ninny is one as thinks himself one. As for sin, if she (*he points to the ceiling*) was steeped in it, they as judge she had best baptize themselves in sin instead of virtue, I 'm thinking.

BEN

[*Hitting the floor with his stick.*] You 've never shown man over this, Luke. You never taught your woman her kneeling paces or

felled her lover into the mud where he do belong.

LUKE

[*Grasping his father's arm and speaking fiercely.*] Drop it. Father or no father my fist will be in thy face if thee dares to speak again over she like this 'ere. I 've no cause to think of kneeling *but* to she, and I 'll own I 've done it both living and dead. My business is with myself and not with no others. I know what she be to me. I 've heard her words to me and not the everlasting trumpets can din them out of my ears. Do you reckon me a white-livered fool what has never had her kisses or her love-looks? Why! I 'm buttressed, in a manner of speaking. I 've had all as belonged to me and no gossip and no gibing and not death nor hell itself can rob me of it.

BEN

[*Springing back from the grip of his son and laughing roughly.*] That 's just it. You *have* been robbed right afore your eyes. You 'm a forthright fool. You 've had what belonged to you, right enough, and that 's shame. She 've fooled you up hill and down dale. She kept you quiet with them vows and kisses so that she —

LUKE

Did n't you never love mother that you speak like this 'ere?

[LUKE *leaps forward as if to strike and stands riveted before the hate in his father's eyes and his uplifted stick.* BEN *speaks fiercely.* LUKE *stands with his hands having fallen by his side and his mouth closely shut as he watches his father.*

BEN

Love! Don't talk so silly. We did n't used to jaw so much 'bout love when I were young. We got a fancy when the primroses came out, and the cowslips and harebells followed, for a comely lass as could make a light pasty and a good saffron cake, and one as could see to the linen bein' darned and keep things a bit fittey in the house. All this gimcrack talk of love be nothin' but idle frenzy or a touch of the liver complaint. It 's unwholesome. No woman should be put first. It 's bound to turn her constitution tricky. It 's Scripture sense as she should be second to man. She was only a rib to start with, and by all seeming she be less than that in most men's reckoning.

[*Heavy steps are heard above.*

BEN

Who be up there? [*His voice is like a hiss.*] What 's that tramping? Bean't she alone?

[LUKE *speaks very quietly. There is a half smile on his face and his hands are now clasped behind his back.*

LUKE

No.

BEN

Who be there? That be a heavy tread and masterful.

LUKE

Sampson Daniel be there.

BEN

[*Dropping his stick and clenching both hands.*] Sampson Daniel! [*He towers over his son and shouts.*]

LUKE

Iss! He 've been there a good hour and more.

BEN

[*Taking his son by the shoulders and shaking him.*] You paltry little worm, you. This be worse than devil's work. If the neighbors get to know, they won't never come nigh either of us.

[LUKE *shakes himself free with a sharp, lithe*

movement and picks up his father's stick and holds it behind his back with his two hands. He laughs bitterly.

LUKE

Let 'em keep away, then. It 's all the same to me. Neighbors' spite can't call back the dead nor yet kill the living as I can see. She and me never reckoned with it. We 'd got enough to warm us outside such truck as that.

BEN

[*Roaring at his son.*] You 'm a measly son of Beelzebub. I 'd sooner have coffined you than cradled you if I 'd known your disposition when you was born. You was allus one for fairy tales more nor football. You could never cuddle up a pretty girl neither till you fell on that half-Irish will o' the wisp as was partly eel and partly pixy.

[*He chokes with rage.*

LUKE

[*Quietly.*] You talk like a crazy, jealous son of Adam and like a lonesome, sour old bachelor.

BEN

[*Calming down for a moment and sinking into a chair overcome with his memories.*] I

thank Heaven, Luke, as I threw back the only fancy I 've ever had in that line afore I married your mother. She were n't never molested with any fancical frenzy of mine at all. Mine was a craze as come with the harvest moon and died with it, but it sobered me for life. I reckoned it a madness and I got over it same as a fever. When I took your mother, I took her, not only for better and worse, but for steady ways and no woman's whimsies. She *had* to behave, and plenty of washing and cleaning sobered she if tantrums and moods came on.

LUKE

Poor mother! No wonder she were such a patient dear.

BEN

I never gave she no chance to stamp on my feelings. There was no time with ten of you and you a delicate little devil we thought was not going to live. No woman 'ave put the heel of her dancin' shoe into my heart nor yet made mincemeat of my constitootion. [*He stoops to rub off some caked mud from his gaiters and* LUKE *watches him thoughtfully.*] Every one knows as you was deceived

and mimicked and mocked like the dolt in Bob Webster's fairy tales.

[LUKE *points to the door with his stick and then hands it to his father. He speaks very sternly.*

LUKE

I 'm dead sick of this. It 's beyond bearin'. She only died last night and I be most dead yet. [*His voice sinks to a hoarse whisper.*] Jawin' ain't here nor yet there. Just leave me be. What is, is, and what is n't, is n't, and neither you nor me nor the neighbors can alter things. If my heart was n't sore and my body wore down with want of sleep, I 'd perhaps surprise you all with a truth or two. Not that you 'd believe me, 'cause, seemly, lies be easier to swallow and more refreshin', by all the signs.

BEN

[*Striding to the door and turning round after opening it.*] I 'm off, but I 'm casting you from me, mind, and all the village shall know it before sunset. You make me sick with your feeble talk. It 's like the chatter of white-faced curates and tea-drinking girls. No sap in it. You deserve all you 've got. You 'm chicken-livered and soppy. Good-bye. [*Bangs door loudly after him.*]

[LUKE *turns quietly to the fire and pokes it. He*

puts on the kettle. As he turns toward the settle, the door opens and SAMPSON DANIEL *comes in. The men's eyes meet and then lower.* SAMPSON DANIEL *is a tall, virile man with broad shoulders and dark curly hair. He is clean-shaven and wears a hunting-farmer's suit and stock; close-fitting gray breeches and black leather gaiters. He takes down his hunting-crop from near the door and his hat from a nail close by as* LUKE *comes over to him. At the sight of* LUKE'S *face he replaces the hat but keeps the crop in his hand with which he now and then hits his gaiters.*

LUKE

Sampson Daniel, you and me must place she in her box to-night. She shan't be touched by hired strangers.

[SAMPSON *clasps each end of his crop behind his bushy head and faces* LUKE. *His thin mouth is tightly shut and his tall frame seems strung to some muscular act.* LUKE *smiles up at him drearily.*

LUKE

She'd have had it so.

[LUKE *speaks gently.* SAMPSON *does not move. He only looks down upon* LUKE.

LUKE

I've no call to see different to she.

[SAMPSON'S *arms drop suddenly. He jerks his*

hunting-crop between his hands and it snaps in two.

SAMPSON

Good God!

LUKE

[*Coming quite close to* SAMPSON *and touching him on the sleeve.*] Sampson Daniel, I'd comfort thee if I knew how, but I 'm sorely beset myself. I 'm most gone in.

[SAMPSON *picks up one of the pieces of the riding-crop and twirls it in the air. It flies from his hand and hits* LUKE.

SAMPSON

Pardon.

LUKE

For what?

[SAMPSON *points to the fallen whip.* LUKE *smiles.*

LUKE

Oh! that!

SAMPSON

Luke, I hate saints, allus did.

LUKE

[*Looking in* SAMPSON'S *face gravely.*] I can't say as I have any particular taste for 'em myself unless they happen to come unawares into the family. Mother were a bit

that way inclined, and I suppose you was thinking there 's a second now ?

[*He points to the ceiling.* SAMPSON'S *face relaxes into a broad smile.*

SAMPSON

Good sakes, man, no ! A pixy be most akin to a wild flower, not to a saint.

LUKE

[*Patting* SAMPSON'S *arm.*] That 's the first comforting speech I 've heard sin' she passed. It do belong, some way.

SAMPSON

[*Speaking moodily.*] She thought a pile of you. It be terrible hard on you.

LUKE

[*Lowering his eyes and putting his hands in his pockets.*] There 's not much pickin' and choosin' between you and me, but of course there 's lawful and unlawful. She were allus gamesome, but sweet as lavender, as you do know.

SAMPSON

[*Quietly.*] Iss ! I do knaw.

LUKE

I was never a dancing chap. They only just saved me having troll feet, they say, so

I missed what you fell on. She was that light on her feet she minded me of a dragon-fly.

[SAMPSON *grinds his teeth and squares his shoulders. He suddenly runs his fingers through his curly hair.*

LUKE

I was never good at book learnin'. I was confined to fairy tales as a youngster, and they spoilt me for solid reading. I 'd have dearly loved to dance. She was enough to set cripples doing the lancers in that pink muslin of hers and slippers fit for a fairy. I can see you two now spinning round like tops at Hollow's Feast.

[LUKE *hesitates a moment and then points to the chair where his father had sat.* SAMPSON *sits down, and* LUKE *stands facing audience, though speaking dreamily to* SAMPSON.

LUKE

When we went home that night I warmed up milk for her and she were like a child with joy and sprightliness. "Luke," says she to me, "I would n't be no man if mugs of gold went with the christening!" Fancy she a man browbeating the world!

[*Both men throw back their heads and laugh softly.* SAMPSON DANIEL *suddenly stands*

up and takes hold of LUKE's *shoulder and turns him toward the window. He speaks hoarsely.*

SAMPSON

Hop o' my thumb, I believe thee 's got a halo.

LUKE

What be that? I seem to know, but I can't strictly place it.

SAMPSON

[*Speaking solemnly.*] By Heaven! It 's placed.

LUKE

I was never no great shakes at guessing anything, but she was splendid at it.

SAMPSON

[*Throwing down the other half of the hunting-crop.*] Luke! Maybe I 've made you a bit of a byword without exactly meaning to.

LUKE

[*Folding his arms across his chest.*] No byword have ever come between me and she and nothing else counts.

[SAMPSON's *eyes almost close as he speaks curtly.*

SAMPSON

Don't you want to ask me no questions?

LUKE

[*Smiling up into* SAMPSON's *face.*] Why, no. What about?

SAMPSON

Good God!

LUKE

Why, yes! I do, to be sure. There is just one. It come in my mind when father was talking here a bit since. I shall be rare and lonely in the evenings, for things fall heaviest after dusk, I reckon. Least ways, they did after mother passed. You be a bachelor and I be a widower, and both on us 'ave the same ideas about crops. We was rivals, but that 's over. Why should n't we live together and make a big thing of the farming?

[SAMPSON *sits down — leans his head on his hand and his elbow on the table and gazes at* LUKE. *Speaks quietly.*

SAMPSON

What a hop-o'-my-thumb notion!

LUKE

She 'd fall in with it.

SAMPSON

Would she? I don't see how either one of us can be sure of that.

[LUKE *swings his right leg backwards and forwards as he leans toward* SAMPSON.

LUKE

Maybe she 'd find either one of us easier if we be together, that is if her spirit be let travel homeward at times. She 'd lots of fancies over these things, as, of course, you do know?

SAMPSON

No, I don't know. That 's *your* trail, not mine.

LUKE

Well, it be a rare comfort to me now. "I 'll come to you, Luke," she said, "if I die first and if I 'm allowed. I 'll just laugh in your ear if you be mopey!" In a manner of speaking I ain't tore abroad, except by neighbor's cackle, as I might be, just because of what she said about coming back.

[SAMPSON *frowns and looks down and kicks the table leg with his foot.*

SAMPSON

She 'd likely only come to you. Others

would be out of the reckoning. I 've no truck with ghosts and such.

LUKE

'T ain't exactly a matter of ghosts. A pixy thing be a sort of spirit to start with, and it seems to me, we 're bound, one or both of us, to have a sign. If it 's a fearsome one, we 'd best be together, and if it 's a gladsome one, as be very likely, she 'd reckon on us to share it.

SAMPSON

The talk would be worse than ever then.

[LUKE *smooths back his hair with both hands and leans on the table.*

LUKE

They can't make me what they thinks me, thanks be, nor you neither, and as for she, they 'd neither the making or the unmaking of she.

SAMPSON

[*Biting his lips and watching* LUKE *keenly.*] They 'll torment you if you 've doubts.

LUKE

Doubts! Of what? Heaven and sich? That 'ave never fretted me same as some. Of course, now it 's a dwelling-place for she,

maybe I 'll turn my mind more that way, but I 've never questioned but all were for the best.

SAMPSON

I was n't particularly thinking of heaven. Some would doubt she after the talk there 's been lately.

LUKE

[*Scornfully.*] Some would hit the breasts as fed 'em. I 've memories enough to make their silly talk no more nor sheep's bleatin'.

SAMPSON

They might tell you they 'd proof.

[SAMPSON'S *right hand grasps his curls as he gazes at* LUKE.

LUKE

Proof of what?

[*He looks gravely at* SAMPSON, *whose face is drawn and haggard.*

SAMPSON

That I loved her. [*The words are snapped out like a bark.*]

[LUKE *moves the boiling kettle from the fire and* SAMPSON *stretches his arms above his head. The two men face one another and* LUKE *smiles.*

LUKE

Thee 's given me the proof of that thyself. All their chatter be but swine's gurgling in comparison. Have n't I seen her eyes fixed on thee and thy mouth closed like a trap against the kisses thee 's wanted same as food and drink? No man worth calling a man could do aught but feel a drawin' to she, and no man callin' himself a man could believe any ill o' she or beguile her into wrong-doing.

SAMPSON

Stop! for the love of God, stop!

[*His face becomes agonized and the sweat stands out on his brow and upper lip.*

LUKE

It's just because you knew the sweet grain of she, and never took the winsome smile out of her face with fool's vanity, that I 'd dearly like to dwell alongside of you. I 'm drawn to you like a brother, and Sampson and Luke, same as Jonathan and David, must comfort one another because the love of a woman passes all understanding. No, mate, I 've never had a doubt of either of you, never once. How could I? She allus told true.

SAMPSON

Iss! she allus told true.

LUKE

When shall it be?

SAMPSON

I thought it was settled for Thursday.

LUKE

Not the funeral. You and me.

[SAMPSON *grips* LUKE'S *hand fiercely.*

SAMPSON

To once. Thee shan't spend one night by thyself to mourn without hope. Not one. She'd wish it so.

LUKE

Iss! mate. She'd surely wish it so.

[*They clasp hands while looking in each other's eyes.*

CURTAIN

THE MOTHERS

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

MARK CROCKER (*a Cornish farmer*).
SELINA CROCKER (*Mark's wife*).
HANNAH BRIMMICOMB (*a widow to whom Mark is attracted*).

THE MOTHERS

THE SCENE *is laid in a Cornish farm kitchen. Deep window-seat on* L. *Fireplace facing audience. Door leading to road* R. *Table under window, but well out in room, and settle at top of table by side of fireplace (cornerwise). Usual kitchen furniture. As curtain goes up,* MARK CROCKER *is seen sitting on the settle finishing his dinner.* SELINA, *having finished hers and moved the things she has used aside, is busy making "heavy cake" for tea.* MARK *eats little and keeps staring at* SELINA. *At last he thrusts his plate, cup, and saucer impatiently on one side and folds his arms as he tilts his chair back and gazes at his wife. She goes on mixing dough — now and then looking at him in a fixed way, and after each look pounding her paste in the bowl more vigorously.*

MARK

My blessed grandfather! You might be deaf and dumb. [SELINA *smiles.*] Where be John James and Susan Annie?

SELINA

To school.

MARK

Look! [*Thumping table.*] Let's get at

close range, I 'm damned sick of beating round bushes.

[SELINA *suddenly stops her work and leans forward toward* MARK.

SELINA

I 'm hoping you are. I 'm a bit sick as well as you.

[MARK'S *head lowers a moment, and he lays down his pipe, leans forward in his chair, and looks at his wife.*

MARK

Marriage be a great frustration.

[SELINA *thumps the dough with her doubled fist and* MARK *puts his thumbs in his waistcoat, drumming on it impatiently with his fingers.*

MARK

Here 's the straight tip. I 'm thy husband, thee 'rt my wife, and a better one no man ever had. Now, fix this up if you can. I 'm madly —

[*He frowns, stops and bites his lips.* SELINA *comes toward him and puts her hand on his shoulder as she almost whispers.*

SELINA

Don't say it, Mark. The children is between thy thought and thy speech. And it is n't as if I did n't know.

[MARK *frowns and closes his eyes as he mutters.*

MARK

Thee 's allus so darned reasonable, Selina. It 's that as 'ave partly made me wander. A man must have flicker betimes. He can't go steady trot and never a canter. If I could have she, I 'd likely love thee more.

SELINA

[*With a gasp and sob.*] You 've gone and said it.

MARK

And mean it.

[SELINA *returns quietly to her pastry-making, and* MARK *begins to fill his pipe.*

MARK

Thee 's far too daft on me. Man and wife should be staid and settled in a manner of speaking.

SELINA

[*Very quietly.*] So I do think.

MARK

Thee 's more demandin' now than in our first courtship and even as a bride.

[SELINA *rolls the pastry out on her board and hits it slowly with the rolling-pin.* MARK *watches her sullenly.*

MARK

Bean't I right?

SELINA

Seemly being daft over thee, if that 's what you reckon I be, Mark, don't make me sure. I 'm only sure about the children.

MARK

The children! You 'll soon be daft over they too.

SELINA

[*Gently.*] They won't tire. They 'm fixed.

MARK

Say, you don't know. Too much be as bad as too little even in youngsters.

[SELINA *suddenly stands taut and puts her hands behind her back and clasps them fiercely together.*

SELINA

What of she? [*She speaks bitterly.*] Is she scanty i' talk and steadfastness that she be worth while?

[*The man takes his pipe from his mouth and lays it on the table. His face softens and a smile spreads over it.*

MARK

She? What, as you do say, of she?

SELINA

She 've children, too, older than ours.

MARK

I never think upon they.

[SELINA *laughs bitterly and begins to gather up the plates and dishes.* MARK *walks restlessly about the room.*

SELINA

What do you think would become of them and of ours if you was flighty with she? What would the neighbors say?

[MARK *stands up suddenly and looks calmly at* SELINA.

MARK

They 'd only pity thee and blame me.

SELINA

[*With a gesture of impatience.*] Is that what you think I 'm cut out for? Pity? Soon my own children will kiss me to comfort me because their father loves a woman who is not their mother.

[*She begins to cut some dough and fits it into a baking-tin.* MARK *watches her thoughtfully and then speaks slowly.*

MARK

It 's damned jealousy, that 's all about it.

[SELINA *suddenly thrusts the knife she is holding in her hand toward* MARK.

SELINA

What if I was drawn to another man? How then?

[MARK *laughs loudly and chucks her under the chin. They stand facing one another.*

MARK

Don't be foolish, that 's not likely.

SELINA

No. [*She speaks sneeringly.*] But if it was so? Would thee come to me and urge me to leave thee?

MARK

I 'm not a ninny. Women be women.

SELINA

And men men. Seein' as it 's so, I 'm not for argufyin' nor yet resentin'. It 's like childbirth, the less noise you make and fuss the better for everybody all round. If she be daft on thee, neither me nor any other body can stop it. She will win.

MARK

It 's not in nature to be otherwise. [*Thoughtfully smoking pipe.*] I be unbeknowns over this even to myself.

[SELINA *puts down the knife and places her hand a moment on her husband's shoulder.*

SELINA

I bean't a mother for nothin', Mark. Go thy ways without thought of me. Women gets their comfort sideways, in a manner of speaking. Men gets theirs forthright. We 've our whimsies and you have your big catches. A woman as knows anything do never stand in the way of a man hunting and shooting. It 's his disposition same as slyness be ours.

MARK

[*Impatiently, smoking furiously, and pointing toward his wife with his pipe.*] It 's them out-of-the-way speeches, Selina, as beats me. I 've no call to go out of my way to hurt thee, but I can't be tied to thy apron-strings.

SELINA

[*Very quietly as she puts away the things and folds the tablecloth.*] Marriage bean't like no apron-string. It be most like an iron chain.

MARK

Or a jail door. [SELINA *sighs.*

SELINA

Thee 's allus been free as a gull, Mark. Bondage would be more new-fangled for thee than liberty.

MARK

I 've done my best by thee.

[SELINA *bangs a cupboard door to* R., *where she has been putting away sugar, etc. She wheels round.*

SELINA

Is that what she 's told thee, or what thee 've taught she, I wonder? It might be g'eat virtue instead of love 'twixt man and wife to hear thee talk.

MARK

We do never scarcely speak of thee. It 's best not. She knows I love thee, right enough.

SELINA

[*Bitterly.*] I wonder how she found that out?

MARK

By signs, of course. A man don't never wait to take kisses if there bean't no obstacle. She knows that.

[*He jerks his head back and clasps his hands behind it.*

MARK

But it 's most beyond me now. So there! I had to say it. It 's fair choking me. We 'll leave it be. It 's all we can do.

SELINA

Iss! We 'll leave it be. Shall I make thee a savor for thy tea?

[MARK *gazes at his wife. Her whole tone and attitude have changed into tender motherliness.*

MARK

As you 've a mind to, woman. I be going out after.

[*He looks away shamefacedly as he unhooks his cap from the door.* SELINA *takes a clothes-brush from the shelf and brushes his coat.*

SELINA

[*Kindly.*] How be the cow and calf?

MARK

Nicely. A fine bull calf and some g'eat sucker.

[*He goes out and bangs the door.* SELINA *goes to a little mirror on the wall and gazes into it for some time. Then she sits down. She suddenly rises, wipes her eyes with her apron, and opens a drawer in the kitchen table. She takes out a bundle of children's half-dried pinafores and socks and hangs them on a little clothes-horse near the fire. Her face brightens as she does it. She suddenly takes a little sock in her hand and holds it against her cheek.*

SELINA

They bean't lent, anyway. They belong, same as the veins in my body.

[*A knock at the door startles her. She opens it and faces* HANNAH BRIMMICOMB. *The two women stand speechless before one another.* HANNAH BRIMMICOMB *is dressed very daintily, and her easy movements and beautiful figure contrast with the regularity of figure and sharpness of expression of* SELINA. SELINA *looks bitterly at* HANNAH.

HANNAH

[*Nervously.*] Are you alone, Mrs. Crocker?

SELINA

[*Dully.*] The children are at school. Come in and sit down. I meant to come to you this very afternoon. It 's perhaps as well it 's this way. Sit.

[HANNAH *sits and draws chair nearer as if she expected* SELINA *to sit too.* SELINA *draws herself to her full height and smooths her parted hair down with both hands for a second.*

SELINA

I can talk better standing, though talk won't help much. My husband be leaving me for you. I need n't tell you what you

know already, but I want him to think of our children. It 'll be a slur on they.

HANNAH

[*Hesitatingly.*] I 'm North-Country, as you know. I was only amongst you all for a few months before my husband died. The two years have been very lonely.

SELINA

Stealin' don't make things easier.

[MRS. BRIMMICOMB *stands up, puts out a hand and withdraws it as* SELINA *ignores it. But as she sits again, she slowly draws off her gloves, her head bent.*

SELINA

Mark be dazzled same as a child i' full sunlight. When he 's smoking, he be thinkin', and when he 's working, it 's the same and — and — [*she hesitates and clenches her hands together*] — even when h'm dreaming, he do make use of your name. [*Lowering her eyes.*] That 's how I first fell on it. [MRS. BRIMMICOMB *looks up and gazes at* SELINA.] Iss! It is a thing to color up for. I be covered with shame inside and out that I be forced to sit before a stranger and beg for my children.

HANNAH

[*In surprise.*] Beg!—for your children?

SELINA

Iss! Beg to a woman of your make. They 'm wonderful happy and there 'd be a stain on them.

HANNAH

I 've often wondered about you. To think this is our first real talk, only nods before.

SELINA

Mark saw to that, seemly. It began afore he ever knew. First sight, I should think.

HANNAH

So he says.

[SELINA *stamps her foot and almost hisses and then turns to the fire and rearranges the children's clothes.* HANNAH *watches her wistfully.*

SELINA

I wish me and the children could go and leave you both. We 're best away. But we 've no money and the talk would be worse.

HANNAH

But you love him.

[SELINA *draws a chair near and kneels with one knee on it, staring at* HANNAH.

SELINA

Love! I never make use of no such word nowadays. It 's been all suffering so long.

HANNAH

Poor dear!

SELINA

How dare you? [*Roughly.*] I want none of your pity, considering it 's been all you.

HANNAH

[*Meaningly.*] Has it?

SELINA

[*Bitterly.*] Iss! The woman allus beckons and the man follows. Women don't never uphold one the other. They as win be covered with vanity and triumph whether they calls theirselves bad uns or good uns.

HANNAH

[*Drawing her chair closer to* SELINA.] What would you have done in my place?

[*She puts a hand on* SELINA'S *knee.*

SELINA

Spit at him. Anything to save the children even if I hated the woman.

[HANNAH *smiles and* SELINA *sits down by her.*

HANNAH

You seem to know very little about men, Mrs. Crocker. I 'd no wish to bind him to me forever. Scorn would have led to scenes, and in scenes no one can tell what might have happened. I 've always shunned them. It was after a scene that I took my husband for better or worse.

SELINA

[*More gently.*] You love mine now and want him — that suffices. He 's going to you this very night and any time might — might —

[*She puts her face in her hands and beats the ground with her foot.*

HANNAH

Be the end.

SELINA

What do you mean? [*She looks up at* HANNAH *in a bewildered way.*] You sit there as calm and stolid as if you was n't worse nor a thief and a witch.

HANNAH

I'm neither. I'm just a mother, like you.

SELINA

[*In a dull, even voice.*] I ain't slept proper for weeks and every morsel I eat tastes like chaff.

HANNAH

[*Gently.*] How you love him, and he knows it!

SELINA

[*Bitterly.*] Ain't he by chance told you how much he do love me? It's not sufferable that I should be the only one to be supposed to care. I would n't have done it to you nor to no woman.

HANNAH

I've done nothing.

SELINA

That 's pretty brazen, anyway.

[HANNAH *rises and walks up and down once or twice with her hands clasped behind her back, and then faces* SELINA *with her right forefinger emphasizing what she says.*

HANNAH

I'm speaking nothing but the truth. When your husband told me he loved me,

it was a greater surprise to me than it was to you. I was not prepared for such a strange thing, but I hate to see suffering, and I believed he was very wretched. I probably made up my mind why he said what he did, and at first I felt hard toward you. I thought you did not care for him and made him suffer, and I wanted badly to help.

[SELINA *pushes* HANNAH *down in her chair again and rises. She puts the kettle on the fire and gets out the tea-cloth, and as she speaks leaves the table and gets out saffron cake, etc. She leans over the table toward* HANNAH *as she finishes and speaks slowly and thoughtfully.*

SELINA

Interference between husbands and wives be never helpful. It 's allus a hinderment. It would be hardly bearable if angels took it in hand, but when a woman choked with vainglory meddles, it 's most past mending.

[*She makes the tea and beckons to* HANNAH. HANNAH *draws her chair to the table and speaks quietly.*

HANNAH

If I 'd only seen you together, it would have made all the difference. I was foolish enough to be afraid of meeting you. He

took me by surprise, and a man's stealth and persuasion moithered me and kept me wondering and the time has flown till now. Something he said to me the other day made the truth appear to me, and now we 're here and can talk. I wanted to come to you, but I 'm not much at explaining. I grew to care for you in a strange, silent way because I understood.

[SELINA *stands holding the teapot in air and then drops it suddenly on the table. She folds her arms across her breast and laughs bitterly.*

SELINA

[*With emphasis.*] Care for me?

HANNAH

Yes, for you. I knew how you must be feeling and I wondered what you would have done if you 'd been me.

[SELINA *sits down and wipes her lips with the corner of her apron and pours out a cup of tea.* HANNAH *draws up to the table.*

SELINA

Kissed him, after all, I suppose. How can I tell? I ain't never been tried. Nobody ain't never wanted me but Mark, and he soon tired.

[HANNAH *takes up her cup and hands it to* SELINA.

HANNAH

You drink first. You 're tired more than I am. [SELINA *pours out another and drinks.*] He 's never kissed me, and that 's why he 's so crazy over me. He 'd soon cure if he had. He 's red-hot, and that never lasts. Somehow I would n't let him. It 's different, too, now I 've seen you. He 's a born hunter, but it 's a vixen he 's tracking, not a fox. Your cubs and mine are safe.

[SELINA *sips her tea very slowly, her eyes on the table, as if thinking deeply.*

SELINA

I 'm considerably took back.

[HANNAH *sips her tea and takes some cake* SELINA *offers.*

HANNAH

He 's quite curable, and I mean to cure him and at once. It is not me he loves the most of us three.

SELINA

[*Incredulously.*] You don't want him?

HANNAH

[*Emphatically.*] No. He is a child now in my eyes, and children must be cured of fevers.

SELINA

[*Drawing the words out slowly and gulping more tea.*] Then you 're *not* daft on him as he thinks?

HANNAH

Oh! I 'm quite fond of him. At first I own I was taken with his way. You know what vigor he has, and how he talks and hits things and tosses his head.

SELINA

[*Smiling.*] Iss! — like a g'eat boy with a new top.

HANNAH

[*Looking steadily at* SELINA *and stretching out her hand across the table.*] A woman can't give her soul as a top.

SELINA

It ain't made probably for constant spinning, sure enough. I never thought of that.

HANNAH

Nor for being wound up by fits and starts, just to hear the hum.

SELINA

Not at all.

[*She leans back in her chair and watches* HANNAH *with a gradual relaxing of her features.*

HANNAH

He drew me so strangely to you and away from himself by all the things he said and did. Do you believe me? I like you, why should I deceive you?

SELINA

[*Slowly.*] There's a semblance of truth about it all.

HANNAH

It's gospel truth from woman to woman.

SELINA

They do generally say from man to man.

[*The two women rise simultaneously and* SELINA *puts back the clothes-horse to the fire.* HANNAH *helps her to turn the little clothes.*

HANNAH

As far as I am concerned, your husband is as clean as your own children.

SELINA

[*Shakes out a pair of little cotton breeches.*] And as foolish. [HANNAH *suddenly takes* SELINA'S *hand and presses it to her face.*] You've a cool hand.

HANNAH

And a grip.

SELINA

I feel a g'eat load gone from my chest.

HANNAH

You love him more than you know.

SELINA

[*Simply.*] I 'm his wife. It 's nature.

HANNAH

You dear!

[*She draws* SELINA *to her and kisses her very tenderly.* SELINA *draws away slowly from the embrace.*

SELINA

I 'm real refreshed. It 's like a cooling drink when any one be thirsty. I 've never cottoned to girls nor women folkses. I 've no chums. This be different. Seemly, it 's a part of Mark.

[*She clears away all trace of the meal.*

HANNAH

We 'll mother him and all the children, too. This has taught me more than I ever knew before about what being a mother really means.

SELINA

It be right through our make-up, seemly.

HANNAH

Not to one another. That be a sister's part.

SELINA

It be a tower of strength, anyway. I feel fortified all through my system.

HANNAH

We know the secrets.

SELINA

And keep 'em.

HANNAH

Fast.

[*The two women smile into one another's faces as they hold hands and suddenly kiss.* HANNAH *moves toward the door with head lowered as if to hide her smile as she disappears.* SELINA *folds the children's aired clothes and puts them on a chair. She begins to dust the mantel-shelf and little kitchen, stopping now and again as if thinking. The door is suddenly burst open and* MARK *steps in. He takes down a pipe from the mantel-shelf, fiercely empties it, and rams tobacco into the bowl.* SELINA *flicks dust from his coat. He shakes his shoulders and says suddenly as he takes off his coat and hangs it up.*

MARK

Matches.

[SELINA *goes to the cupboard and finds matches and hands them to her husband. He lights his pipe, smokes quickly and faces* SELINA.

MARK

Let 's have a cup of tea, sharp. My mouth be dry. Woman! — [MARK *speaks slowly and bitterly*] — You be right. She be a hussy. Damn her!

SELINA

[*Putting on kettle.*] Have you been to see her? I thought you were n't going till night!

MARK

So *she* thought. But I met her just now. Fell on her after she 'd been crying or something. Her eyes had tales in 'em, and I guessed to oncet and she could n't deny. My gosh! Selina! Thee be revenged, sure enough. I 'm surely seemly in thy place now.

[*He sits down near table and leans his head on his right hand.*

SELINA

My place! You 'm dreaming.

MARK

No! I'm not. [*Roughly.*] I'm jolly well wide awake at last. I thought she a fine 'un, but she 'm a whimsy same as lots of women.

[*He suddenly tilts his chair and clasps his hands behind his head. He has dropped his pipe on the table.*

MARK

She 've left me like a bleating calf at the stable door. She had been with some one just afore I met her. She could n't deny it. She cares for him, too.

[*He suddenly unclasps his hands and throws his pipe in the fireplace.*

MARK

Even that has no savor. It 's all like death itself.

SELINA

Death, seemly, be a finish. Perhaps this be a beginning.

MARK

Talk sense, Selina, not riddles. [*Irritably.*] Facts is facts. She 've made a dashed fool of me I tell thee.

SELINA

Have you ever kissed her?

MARK

No. [*Shortly.*] I meant to make her kiss me to-night. A man be a bit pacified if he 've won, even halfway.

SELINA

[*Looking curiously at* MARK *and holding him by one shoulder as she bends over him.*] Did n't thee try just now? Thee 's got a look —

[*She stops as* MARK *suddenly jumps up and paces about the kitchen. As if too hot, he flings off his waistcoat.*

MARK

Oh! damn it! shut up. Why frenzy me with such fancies? *You 'd* best start kissing me again, I reckon, according to she. I feel mad — mad. She jolly well gave me the go-by, and said as I was to go and kiss you if I wanted kisses. Flung up in my face a few out-of-the-way words I once said about you. Told me I was no man, and that she despised me. I stamped with rage at last, and she only laughed. Laughed! Do you hear? [*As* SELINA *smiled and stooped to pick up* MARK'S *pipe from the fireplace.*] Said I was like her boy Rob when he fired his popgun. At that I just marched away, but she called me back with a bit of her old manner.

SELINA

Oh!

[*Handing him his pipe which he snatches and puts in his big waistcoat pocket.*

MARK

[*Pointing to a chair for* SELINA *to sit on.*] She be a false, flighty woman, but there's just one thing I like in she even yet.

SELINA

Sakes! Mark! Only one! At dinner-time there was n't one you did n't like.

MARK

At dinner-time I thought she was daft on me, too. That makes all the difference.

SELINA

What 's the thing left, I wonder?

[MARK *lights his pipe and speaks slowly and almost gently.*

MARK

She spoke of you as if she'd known what you was. She said she wished she was good like you. I 'm a blasted fool, but it came over me like a soft shower of rain what you 'd had to put up with in this truck and she not worth a pennord of it, and carin', seemly, for some one else all the time. Sakes alive! I 'd never

have let on even to thee if I was n't in a boil of hate and rage. No man tells his wife his fooleries, and now there 's another poor devil let in by a woman's eyes, whoever he be.

[SELINA *folds the children's clothes and puts the kettle right on the fire to make it boil.*

SELINA

It may n't be no man at all.

[MARK *flings his head back and laughs.*

MARK

If it bean't no man, who the devil should it be? A woman? No! my patience, I do know she.

SELINA

[*Thoughtfully.*] Perhaps nobody don't never know another.

MARK

[*Standing up and putting his arm around* SELINA'S *waist. His voice has lost its bitterness.*] Iss! they do, my gosh! I do know thee, Selina, right through. The difference between you two be the difference between night and day. I knew that bit of gust would be over afore I came back, and you be as comfortable as possible in spite of all this flare-up.

SELINA

[*Gently freeing herself from his embrace.*] Seems to me, Mark, women be much of a muchness. They be unlike men-folkses, and even their frenzies be things apart, seemly, and to their selves.

MARK

Thee 's daft on me still, woman, in spite of all this 'ere set out. Curse her — she never cared a bit.

[*Suddenly kissing* SELINA, *who kisses him again as a mother would her child as she holds his head to her and smooths back his hair from his hot forehead.*

MARK

Thee kisses most like mother. No fire and brimstone, but just soothey. It 's a real ease to a poor devil as be tired and tormented past bearing.

CURTAIN

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